ITALIAN LECTURE

The Origins of a National Monarchy: Tradition and Innovation in the Cult of the House of Savoy During the Risorgimento

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During the period 1848–78 (which except for the first year coincides with the reign of Victor Emanuel II, the 're galantuomo') the Savoy monarchy was transformed from a purely dynastic institution into a symbol of national unity. The reactions to Victor Emanuel's death and his later funeral in the Pantheon show beyond any doubt that the image of the King as 'father of the nation' was widely accepted, and that his popularity extended beyond the circle of the notables and the bourgeoisie who were the promoters of the cult of the monarchy to significant sectors of the urban working classes.

That the 'myth' of the monarchy's role during the critical phase of the Risorgimento did not correspond to the complex realities of the period is by now a commonplace. One of the first important blows was struck by the American historian Howard McGaw Smyth in his key article of 1935, 'The armistice of Novara: a legend of a liberal King'.[1] This showed that the accepted idea that in the armistice talks at Vignale in March 1849 Victor Emanuel had courageously resisted the pressure of Marshal Radetzky to make him give up the constitution established by the Statuto

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[1] H. McGaw Smyth, 'The Armistice of Novara: a Legend of a Liberal King', *Journal of Modern History*, VII (1935), 141–74.

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was untrue. Radetzky had made no such demand, and Victor Emanuel had, on the contrary, assured him that it was his intention to combat the liberals and restore royal power, though without formally changing the constitution.[2] More recently, Denis Mack Smith has been the protagonist in the effort to strip away the veils of myth and deceit of orthodox royalist history and to tell a less exalting but more credible story.[3]

Although after the fall of the monarchy the old myths were largely discredited or regarded as irrelevant, under the Republic there has been a curious neglect of the monarchy in Italian historiography. The detractors of the monarchy have tended simply to ignore its influence, or at least to repeat the conclusions reached by earlier critics. Only recently has there been a revival of interest. This has been fuelled by two tendencies: one, a greater interest in general in the ruling classes and institutions of the Liberal state and, second, a new interest in the question of the 'nationalization of the masses' understood in the terms of George Mosse's famous book,[4] as a study of political symbolism and the means of its diffusion. The remark made by Renzo De Felice in his preface to the first Italian edition of Mosse's book, that the lesser importance attached by Mussolini to symbols and rituals compared with Hitler can be attributed to the fact that Fascism was not founded on any *preceding* process of the nationalisation of the masses has been questioned and revised, although in comparative perspective it retains some degree of validity.[5] In particular, De Felice's most brilliant pupil and the leading contemporary Italian historian of Fascism, Emilio Gentile, entitled the first chapter of his book on *Il culto del littorio*, 'alla ricerca di una religione civile per la terza Italia'.[6] Among younger historians, Bruno Tobia and Ilaria Porciani have distinguished themselves in research on the monarchy's role in the cult of the nation and the attempt to consolidate national identity.[7]

[2] See below, p. 336.

[3] See D. Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel, Cavour and the Risorgimento* (London, New York, Toronto, 1971); id., *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven and London, 1989).

[4] G. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York, 1975).

[5] Ibid., *La nazionalizzazione delle masse*, tr. L. De Felice (Bologna, 1975), p. xv.

[6] E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome, Bari, 1993), pp. 5–38, (English translation *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

[7] See B. Tobia, *Una patria per gli Italiani. Spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell'Italia unita (1870–1900)* (Rome, Bari, 1991); id., *L'altare della patria* (Bologna, 1998); I. Porciani, *La festa della nazione. Rappresentazione dello Stato e spazi sociali nell'Italia unita* (Bologna, 1997); id., 'Stato e nazione: l'immagine debole dell'Italia', in *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. S. Soldani & G. Turi (Bologna, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 385–428.

This 'new wave' of cultural history and the study of political symbolism, to which I am deeply indebted, has, however, concentrated its attention for the most part on the period after unification. Another reason for my referring to the years 1848–78 as decisive is to draw attention to the *continuity* of a process of myth-making and symbolic construction from the Risorgimento onwards, which does not respect the rigid distinction between 'pre-' and 'post-' unification history, a division which is not always helpful. It was, after all, one of the salient peculiarities of the Italian monarchy that its most important national celebration, the Festa dello Statuto, referred to an event which belonged to the Piedmontese prehistory of the nation. The 'founding event' of the national monarchy was not in itself national.[8]

On the other hand, the story cannot be confined within the limits that I have indicated. Important developments in the cult of the Savoy monarchy took place before 1848, and particularly in the critical period between 1843 and 1848 when the programme for Piedmontese leadership in the process of national construction was first convincingly developed and diffused. And the story would be incomplete without reference to the years after 1878, (the reign of Umberto I), which saw the strongest and most sustained attempt to create the image of a monarchy which would be both popular and national. Apart from the books I have already mentioned, the recent biography of Crispi by Christopher Duggan has this as one of its central themes.[9] It would be unsatisfactory, too, to exclude the story of the posthumous expansion and crystallisation of the cult of Victor Emanuel.

If we turn back to Italy at the end of the 1830s, the first necessity is to rid ourselves of the idea that the Savoy monarchy was somehow predestined to lead the movement towards Italian unity. It was widely regarded as among the most bigoted and repressive regimes in the peninsula, and Piedmont was one of the least Italian regions of Italy, where the use of the Italian language was confined on the one side by the upper classes' preference for French, and on the other by the people's use of a dialect which was particularly incomprehensible to Italian-speakers. The states of the Kingdom of Sardinia formed a remarkably heterogeneous dynastic complex. Apart from Piedmont they comprised Savoy, unmistakably French in geography and culture; the Valle d'Aosta, French-speaking and jealous of its provincial autonomy; Sardinia itself, distant, unknown,

[8] For some of the difficulties this caused, see Porciani, op. cit., pp. 24–5, 59–60.

[9] C. Duggan, *Creare la nazione. Vita di Francesco Crispi* (Rome, Bari, 2000).

peripheral with its own strange customs and language, and the recently annexed territory of Genoa. Now Genoa and Liguria were perhaps the regions in all of Italy where support for the Italian cause was strongest, but the enthusiasm for Italy was linked to anti-Piedmontese feeling and the republican tradition. The prestige of the military monarchy of the house of Savoy, certainly high at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had been shattered by its defeat by Napoleon. Unlike its German counterpart, Prussia, the state had ceased to exist and had been annexed by France. This ensured that it was Milan and Lombardy, the centre of the Republic and later Kingdom of Italy, which would be the focus for embryonic national consciousness.

From another point of view, the centrality of Piedmont in the Risorgimento is a later projection. The liberal revolution of 1821 in Piedmont was a short-lived fiasco, much less important than the 1820 revolution in Naples, which, after all, actually succeeded in creating Italy's first post-1815 constitutional regime. The advantages of Piedmont's strong state tradition should not be minimised; yet it would not be impossible to imagine in a counterfactual way the leadership of Naples, or even within a federal context of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, who were regarded at this time as the most progressive of Italian monarchs, as was shown both by the relative mildness of their censorship and by their decision to host the first of the important National Scientific Congresses.

The King, Charles Albert, was regarded by many as reactionary and by almost everyone as untrustworthy. As a young man, indeed, the Prince of Carignano had been the great hope of the Liberal and pro-French factions in their struggle against the reactionaries, the Jesuits, and the friends of Austria. The conspirators of 1821 believed that he had promised to put himself at their head. But his subsequent betrayal of the revolution, and his failure to intervene on the behalf of the conspirators, had destroyed his moral reputation. In the attempt to live down his earlier flirtation with liberalism, he became conspicuous among the exponents of international reaction. He took part in the storming of the Trocadero during the French invasion of Spain, which put an end to its brief liberal experiment, a widely celebrated exploit, and in 1832 he supported the counter-revolutionary conspiracy of the Duchesse de Berry against the July Monarchy. Since coming to the throne he had distinguished himself by the severity of his repression of the Mazzinian conspiracy of 1833.

Nevertheless in the later 1830s the liberal minority of the nobility drew new hope from Charles Albert's commitment to internal reforms and the decline in influence of the clerical party. He established personal

contacts with some of their number, notably with the brothers Roberto and Massimo d'Azeglio. In 1832, he appointed the former as director of the royal picture gallery, which, in a significant gesture, he opened to the public,[10] and he granted the second an interview in which for the first time he hinted at his desire to undertake a 'national' and anti-Austrian policy. But Massimo d'Azeglio remained for a long time uncertain how much trust he could put in a man with such a well-established reputation for indecision and going back on his word.

It is not part of my task here to assess the real motives of Charles Albert's policy, only to show how from these not very promising beginnings the first steps were taken in the campaign to create the image of a monarchy with a national mission. I use this phrase because it is important to realise that the idea of uniting the whole Italian peninsula under the rule of the House of Savoy appeared much too ambitious even to those few but decisive personalities who were both monarchists and patriots. They contemplated at most two possibilities, which were not necessarily incompatible. One was that of an Italian League or Confederation in which Piedmont would play a hegemonic role; the other, that of the creation of a Kingdom of *Alta Italia* (northern Italy), which would secure Italian independence (but not unity) by expelling the Austrians. The two leading propagandists for a national monarchy, Cesare Balbo and Massimo d'Azeglio, approached the problem with a different emphasis. For Balbo, the essential was the consolidation of Piedmontese military and economic power as a prerequisite for its leading role in the struggle for independence; for d'Azeglio, a common programme of constitutional and economic reforms which would lead to the creation of an Italian customs league and of a 'national opinion'. In spite of his insistence on the importance of Piedmont's military traditions, Balbo did not advocate a military but a diplomatic solution to the problem of Austrian hegemony. Austria should be persuaded to surrender her Italian territories spontaneously in return for annexations in the Ottoman Empire. Balbo prided himself on his realism, but this was not really a very plausible idea. In addition, it would not have provided Charles Albert with the glory and the status as an Italian hero which were his main incentives for pursuing a 'national' policy. D'Azeglio's programme was much subtler,

[10] See N. Nada, *Roberto D'Azeglio*, vol. 1, 1790–1846 (Rome, 1965). However, Roberto d'Azeglio was frustrated by the King's reluctance to concede him the funds and the autonomy necessary for a truly effective cultural policy; see Nada, p. 174 for his unsuccessful attempt to get Charles Albert to buy the collection of the Genoese noble family Durazzo: 'it is not pictures which the King must buy, but Genoese nobles'.

and it had the advantage that it could be pursued without any firm commitment on the part of Charles Albert. It was only necessary to hint that his support would be forthcoming to extend his influence in troubled areas of Italy like the Romagna. It is very important to insist on what the moderate, monarchist patriots did *not* say publicly before 1848.

The idea that the Savoy monarchy would in one way or another put itself at the head of the Italian national movement was successfully diffused in the years before 1846, particularly by Balbo's *Speranze d'Italia* and d'Azeglio's essay on the *Ultimi casi di Romagna*.[11] But the election of Pope Pius IX in 1846 created a wholly new and unexpected situation. It was the neo-Guelph programme of Vincenzo Gioberti which now held centre stage, and according to this programme it was the Pope who should preside over the Italian Confederation. It is true that Gioberti was Piedmontese and insisted on the importance of Piedmont as the strongest state in the Confederation, as its secular arm; yet in Gioberti's messianic vision of a restored Italian *primato* it was the Papacy which had the central role. And as a non-noble former political exile his commitment to the monarchy was not comparable to that of the d'Azeglios or Balbo. Massimo d'Azeglio himself moved to Rome as the place where the action was. In his most important public appearance, at a great banquet organized to celebrate the *Natale di Roma* on 21 April 1847, what he did *not* say is again, I think, especially significant. In his patriotic invocation to Italians to revive their civic and martial virtues, there was no reference to the exploits of the armies of the House of Savoy, but instead a call to imitate the Lombard League against Frederick Barbarossa. And in the two historical novels which had made d'Azeglio famous, *Ettore Fieramosca* and *Niccolò dei Lapi*, it is impossible to find any direct apologia for the historical role of the Savoy monarchy. In fact, d'Azeglio says that he chose a Piedmontese, Grajano d'Asti, as the villain of *Fieramosca* to show that he was superior to the 'municipal spirit'. One can, indeed, see another motive. By portraying Grajano d'Asti quite anachronistically as a traitor for fighting on the French side, he emphasises the essential 'Italianness' of Piedmont.[12]

In fact, the image of the Savoy monarchy between 1846 and 1848 was forced to conform to the prevailing vision of history centred on the glorious epic of the communes. During the festival in Turin for the concession

[11] C. Balbo, *Delle speranze d'Italia* (Paris, 1844); M. d'Azeglio, *Degli ultimi casi di Romagna* (Lugano, 1846).

[12] M. d'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca* (Florence, 1970), pp. 83, 285.

of the Piedmontese Statute granting constitutional government, a central place was taken by the *carroccio*, the symbol of the Lombard League.[13] It was accompanied by trumpeters in medieval costume and by the flag of Savoy. The Lombard League, however, represented not just the union of Italians against a foreign oppressor, but the triumph of civic militias over a formidable army. The contemporary significance was to emphasise the importance of the civic mobilisation of national guards and volunteers over that of the regular army. The other, more strictly neo-Guelph, interpretation of the Lombard League, however, was more compatible with the self-image of the Savoy monarchy and particularly with that of Charles Albert. This, instead, put its accent on Papal leadership and religious fervour. Until Pio Nono abruptly withdrew his support in the allocution of 29 April 1848, the war for independence could be presented as a 'crusade', blessed by the Holy Father himself. In Parma, Padre Gavazzi preached Holy War; and Massimo d'Azeglio, the most representative and effective of all national propagandists, drew up the proclamation which Giovanni Durando, the general commanding the volunteers from the Papal States, issued on 5 April.

> The Holy Father has blessed your swords, which united with those of Charles Albert must move in concord to the extermination of the enemies of God and Italy . . . Soldiers! . . . let us all move adorned with the Cross of Christ. Those who belong to the corps will wear it on their heart. . . . With it and in it we will be conquerors, as were our fathers. Let our war cry be: God wills it![14]

Now Charles Albert had always fancied himself as a crusader, fighting the battles of the Church. He commissioned a statue to his ancestor Amedeo VI, the *Conte Verde*, who had taken part in a rather ineffectual crusade in the fourteenth century. He had more than once been restrained with difficulty from taking on the crusading role, for example by intervening on the side of the Catholic *Sonderbund* in Switzerland. Little matter that these impulses were reactionary and not liberal; in 1848 the figure of Charles Albert could be presented as that of a modern crusader for a Cause in which the interests of religion and the nation were not opposed but united. He had adopted the motto of the Conte Verde, 'J'attans mon astre' in 1834;[15] this initially had no clear political significance, but when he took to circulating medals inscribed with this motto among friends

[13] See P. Brunello, 'Pontida', in *I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell'Italia unita* (Rome, Bari, 1996), p. 19.

[14] L. C. Farini, *Lo Stato Romano dall'anno 1815 al 1850* (Florence, 1853), vol. 2, pp. 54–5.

[15] R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott. L'invenzione del Medioevo nella cultura dell'Ottocento* (Naples, 1993), p. 94. The motto was rediscovered by the historian Luigi Cibrario (see below, p. 332).

and likely supporters in the 1840s it was taken as a hint that he was waiting for the right moment to act against Austria. His appearance, personality, and piety seemed to fit him for the role. So Marco Minghetti, who was on his staff in May 1848, wrote of the 'tall, lean figure' of the King who 'in his life, in his sobriety, his religious devotion, and habits has a great deal of the knights of the Middle Ages; he never smiles.'[16]

At the same time, both historiography and the visual arts were deliberately employed by Charles Albert and his advisers to show dynastic continuity and military prowess. One of the King's first acts of patronage was to commission a large equestrian statue of the great prince and commander of the sixteenth century, Emanuele Filiberto. Emanuele Filiberto was not only a military hero, the commander of the Imperial forces in the decisive battle of St Quentin against France, but also the Duke who decisively reorientated the policy of the Savoy dynasty towards Italy. It is interesting that the original design of the monument was modified; reliefs of the different provinces of the Kingdom were substituted by depictions of Emanuel Filiberto's military triumphs. Another significant aspect of Savoy propaganda in Charles Albert's reign was the patronage of historians and historical research. This did not come easily; there was strong resistance in the noble and bureaucratic establishment of Restoration Piedmont to opening the state archives and exposing the *arcana imperii* to public view. Research into the history of the Piedmontese Estates continued to be discouraged for its constitutionalist implications. Nevertheless, this opening to research laid the foundations for a 'Savoy school' of national history. It was strictly controlled and promoted by a noble elite which identified strongly with the tradition of service to the Crown, men such as Cesare Balbo and the influential jurist and historian of law, Federico Sclopis, who combined the writing of history with official and political careers. An official publication of early historical records, the *Historiae Patria Monumenta*, was undertaken, and in 1840 the loyal historian Luigi Cibrario published the first volume of his History of the Savoy monarchy. Cibrario's first historical work, in 1829, had been a history of the commune of Chieri, designed to show that Piedmont, too, had participated in the glorious movement of the communes. But in his voluminous later works, he saluted the victory of monarchy over 'communal factions', as 'the salvation and the source of force and justice', and pointed out that Piedmont was the only Italian state where this process had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion.[17]

[16] M. Minghetti, *Miei ricordi* (Rome, Turin, Naples, 1889), vol. 2, p. 2.
[17] See *Dizionario biografico italiano*, vol. 25, pp. 278–84, 'Luigi Cibrario'.

The images of Charles Albert as the crusader or the heir of a glorious dynastic tradition did not survive the separation of the Pope from the national cause, and his own military and political failures. It was easy for his critics, and there were many, to point out that under the surface of his conversion to *italianità*, there survived an old-style dynastic conception of politics and a distrust of popular initiative. In his *Rinnovamento civile*, Gioberti, although he argued that the defection of the Pope left Italians no practicable alternative except to accept Piedmontese hegemony, nonetheless frankly admitted that the performance of Charles Albert, and in a broader sense of Piedmont, in 1848–9 justified scepticism. Gioberti's own personal political disappointments, and his exaggerated sense of his own talents, undoubtedly sharpened his pen; but in a writer more given to cloudy prolixity than to precision, his portrait of Charles Albert and of his politics is unusually acute.

According to Gioberti, Charles Albert had been unable to free himself from the limitations of the traditional mentality of the Piedmontese. 'Piedmont and particularly its capital is after Sicily the region poorest in Italic spirit.' It preserves 'an aloof and restricted life . . . with feudal and servile habits'.[18] Brave in war, Charles Albert had shown himself always timid and irresolute in politics, and temperamentally opposed to extending political responsibility outside his small circle of advisers. He had no real idea of a common Italian nationality: 'his assumptions, although highly national in appearance, in fact were municipal'. Interestingly enough, Gioberti warned against relying on the figure of the King as a symbol of unity. If Italy found a George Washington, 'it could be incarnated in him'. But otherwise 'it must not find any other symbol and banner than itself'. 'Peoples are not abstract entities, but living things', and the need for them to be represented by 'a head' could only be conceded to 'uncultivated states' (*stati rozzi*) but not to those which had reached 'civil maturity'.[19] After unification, this last argument was to be turned on its head. For example, in his important work on *Il Sovrano* the Neapolitan Hegelian De Meis argued that the peasant masses, particularly in the South, were incapable of appreciating abstract ideas or symbols of state power and needed to see it personalised.[20] For this reason, the monarchy

[18] V. Gioberti, *Del Rinnovamento civile dell'Italia* (Paris & Turin, 1851), vol. 1, pp. 216–17. Turin patricians and lawyers particularly feared the loss of Turin's privileges as a capital city and the residence of a royal court.

[19] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 509, 516–17.

[20] See F. Luciani, *Immagine e funzione della monarchia nel pensiero politico e giuridico italiano in età umbertina* (unpub. thesis, Department of Modern and Contemporary History, University of Pisa), pp. 290–4.

had an indispensable role to play in extending the boundaries of loyalty to the new state.

Charles' abdication and death, however, opened up new possibilities for apologists of the monarchy. He could now assume another religious role, that of the martyr. The transposition of religious categories into secular terms is a key feature of the national discourse, which has recently been examined with great acumen by Alberto Banti in his book, *La nazione del Risorgimento*.[21] There was a first and influential attempt to provide a canonical list of national 'martyrs' in Atto Vannucci's 1849 volume on 'the martyrs of Italian liberty from 1794 to 1848'.[22] The dates are significant: Vannucci starts with the Jacobin conspirators in Naples and Piedmont. It is true that exile was often depicted as a kind of halfway martyrdom, especially when accompanied by an early death, as in the case of Ugo Foscolo: still, the extension of martyrdom to an abdicated monarch was something new in a category previously dominated by conspirators and subversive thinkers. Gioberti's comment is again apposite: 'few princes were so savaged when alive and so exalted by the same men when dead as King Charles Albert'.[23] He criticised the uncritical adulation of the dead King as diseducative and harmful to the development of an informed and influential public opinion. The myth of Charles Albert, the sacrificial victim to the cause of Italian independence, was nourished by moving accounts and pictures of his farewell to his country and friends, such as the ever-faithful Cibrario, who later organised his funeral in Oporto. Cibrario's biography of Charles Albert was subtitled 'the initiator and martyr of Italian Independence'. Depictions of Charles Albert, as in Gaetano Ferri's prize-winning painting *Il Lutto del Piemonte* (the mourning of Piedmont) (Fig. 1) emphasised the bond of loyalty which united Charles Albert with his simple subjects, and also their shared piety.

In fact, the breach between the Piedmontese monarchy and the Papacy was not yet as grave as it became after the secularising Siccardi laws and the annexation of Papal territories between 1859 and 1860. After unification, the division between throne and altar was to be the most difficult problem for royal propaganda.

A complementary myth to that of Charles Albert the Martyr soon grew up around the new King, Victor Emanuel. I have already referred at

[21] Turin, 2000.
[22] A. Vannucci, *I martiri dell libertà italiana dal 1794 al 1848* (Turin, 1850).
[23] Gioberti, op. cit., p. 688.

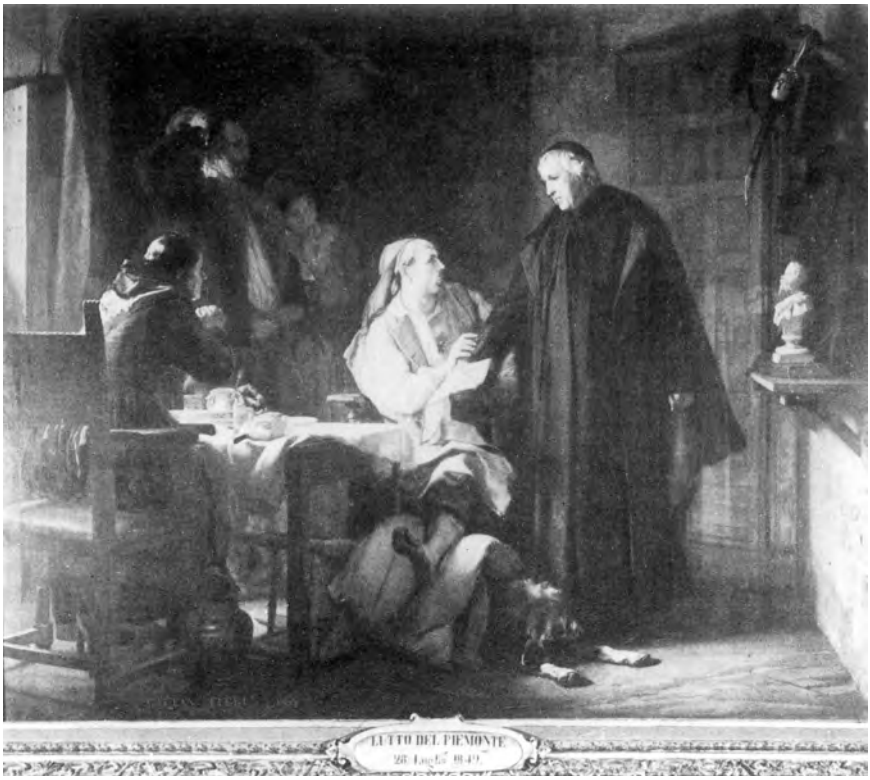

Figure 1. Gaetano Ferri, *Il Lutto del Piemonte.* (E. Castelnuovo & M. Rosci, *Cultura figurativa e architettonica negli stati del Re di Sardegna 1773–1861* (Turin, 1980), vol. 2, ill. 717, p. 654.)

the beginning of this lecture to the myth of the armistice of Vignale (Fig. 2). The painter has underlined his point none too subtly by contrasting Victor Emanuel's dramatic gesture of refusal and his martial pose, standing with one hand on his sword indicating his willingness to fight rather than give way, with the rather insinuating pose of Radetzky, only half-way out of his seat and therefore at a lower level. Why was the myth of Vignale so important? Not only because it obscured the truth about Victor Emanuel's attitude, his determination to bring the opposition to heel, exemplified by his startling declarations to the Austrian ambassador, Apponyi, in 1850 that he was ready to crush the democratic 'canaille' 'like flies . . . let them only move and they will see. I will hang them all.'[24] It was also because the maintenance of the Piedmontese consitution, rather

[24] D. Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel, Cavour and the Risorgimento* (London, New York, Toronto, 1971), p. 44.

Figure 2. Achille Dovera, *Vittorio Emanuele II rifiuta di abolire lo Statuto*. (*Risorgimento: Mito e realtà* (Milan, 1992), p. 89.)

than its original concession, was what differentiated Piedmont from the other Italian states. Piedmont had not been the only or even the first Italian state to grant a constitution in 1847–8, but it was the only one to maintain it after 1849. Similarly, all the Italian monarchs had added the national colours to their own dynastic flags.[25] The maintenance of the tricolour with the Cross of Savoy was an important symbol of the House of Savoy's continued Italian commitment. One may add, however, that the national flag remained an object of controversy. The popular flag was the tricolour without the cross, and we can see its presence even in the demonstrations which greeted unification. Later on, it came to be viewed as positively subversive, until its significance was overshadowed by the Red Flag.

The period after 1848 saw a turning away from the romantic cult of the Middle Ages which had previously dominated the view of the national past. I should not like to overemphasise this point; historical painting and historical librettos for opera remained popular. However, Renaissance and post-Renaissance themes gained ground. Literary and

[25] R. Balzani, 'I nuovi simboli patriottici: la nascita del Tricolore e la sua diffusione negli anni della Restaurazione e del Risorgimento', in *Gli italiani e il Tricolore*, ed. F. Tarozzi & G. Vecchio (Bologna, 1999), p. 155.

art critics showed a certain impatience with historical romances and the *style troubadour*. The reasons lay partly in a general European shift of taste, but also in political disillusionment. The turn towards realistic representation parallelled the turn towards a more hard-headed and realistic attitude to politics. This was noted by Federico Chabod in his great work on the premisses of Italian foreign policy.[26] I should like to quote one contemporary comment, by the art critic Pietro Selvatico, writing in 1851, which seems to me especially revealing. 'Medievalism', he said, was at an end: 'the people had looked to it for the free commune and the corporations, the nobles for their ancient honour, and the more honourably deluded spirits for religion'. Now these ambiguities had been exposed, and 'philosophy' had completed the destruction and opened the way for materialist socialism. Only the family was left as a theme capable of inspiring idealism.[27] I don't think it disproves my thesis if it is admitted that when the nation actually was unified the figuration of medieval themes enjoyed a revival.

In the meantime, in the so-called 'decade of preparation', among the supporters of Piedmont, the military virtues were at a premium. These were no longer those of the romantic rebel or the *condottiere*, but those of the simple soldier. One story from history came to be a paradigm for the virtues of popular devotion to the monarchy and loyalty. This was the story of Pietro Micca. Pietro Micca was a sapper from the province of Biella, who deliberately blew himself up by exploding a mine to prevent the French from taking the citadel of Turin during the siege of 1706. The surprising thing about Micca's story is that it was first revived in the nineteenth century by the former Jacobin Carlo Botta in his 1832 History of Italy with a very different moral from that which it later assumed, namely that of royal ingratitude. Botta quoted the presumably mythical last words of the heroic miner to his officer: 'save yourself, and leave me here alone, for I consecrate my life to the *patria*. All I ask is that my family be taken care of.' But, Botta went on, 'I am ashamed to say how the family of the heroic saviour (of Turin) was rewarded.' They were granted two rations of bread in perpetuity. 'Micca was a plebeian, and the recompense shows the value that at that time was given to the people.'[28] The last survivor of the family was found living in obscurity in the mountains, and was brought to Turin, somewhat bewildered, and given a uniform. A

[26] F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896* (Rome, Bari, 1997), p. 165.
[27] C. Maltese, *Storia dell'arte italiana* (Turin, 1992), p. 86.
[28] C. Botta, *Storia d'Italia*, vol. VII (Capolago, 1832), 352 ff.

medal was coined in honour of his heroic forefather by the corps of engineers; this may also have had a polemical significance, as the engineers together with the artillery represented the modernising wing of the Pidemontese army, frequently in polemic against the noble leadership of the other corps.

It did not take long, however, to realise the use which could be made of the figure of Micca as an example of popular devotion to monarchy and *patria*. In 1837 Charles Albert commissioned a large bronze bust of Micca which was placed in the royal Arsenal: the base of the statue carried sculptures of 'two mortars, a bomb and a cannon with cannon-ball'. The verse inscription on the pedestal composed by the well-known opera librettist Felice Romani commended Micca's valour as an example to 'the *Piedmontese* army'. (*milizia piemontese*). In style, content, and setting, this first monument was a celebration of Piedmontese virtues, including the technical skills shown in bronze-casting, without any clear Italian reference (Fig. 3).[29] Instead the painting exhibited by Giulio Piatti in Florence in 1842 emphasised the patriot rather than the subject. Micca is depicted in a romantic pose, and he was described in a publicity handout for the lithograph of the painting as 'a new Samson . . . with a face pallid because of the horrible death which he sees before him, but firm in his heroic resolution'. The bold execution and dark colours of the painting suited the theme. The passage goes on to describe the function which prints could have. 'Such paintings deserve to be diffused: they can be more eloquent than a page of history, or at least they can render its impression more profound and durable.' A complimentary copy of the lithograph was sent to the historical novelist and fervent democrat Francesco Guerrazzi (Fig. 4).[30] However, as we have seen, by the 1840s Charles Albert was anxious to show the national function of the Piedmontese monarchy and Piedmontese patriotism, and he bought the picture, which was shown the next year in Turin.

There is interesting evidence that the figure of Micca entered into popular consciousness in the next decade. In 1856, the workers' association of Turin presented a picture of Micca to the workers' association of Genoa, in exchange for a picture of the famous revolutionary urchin Balilla. It is clear that this exchange was meant to emphasise the fraternal solidarity of the two cities, and to rob the Balilla image of any subversive content, at a time when Mazzinian republicanism was still a very present threat in

[29] E. Castelnuovo & M. Rosci, *Cultura figurativa e architettonica negli stati del Re di Sardegna 1793–1861* (Turin, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 577–8. The bust classicises and renders abstract the figure of Micca.

[30] Ibid., p. 678.

Figure 3. G. Berra & C. Cattaneo, *Monumento a Pietro Micca*. (*Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, ill. 608, p. 578.)

Genoa. Actually, the Genoa revolt of 1746, which Balilla is supposed to have started, had been anti-Austrian, but inconveniently at that time the Austrians were allied to the Sardinian monarchy. The democratic politician and future Education Minister Michele Coppino admitted that Piedmont had hitherto been poor in popular historical themes compared with other provinces of Italy, and so the discovery of Micca was very welcome. The most popular image of Micca was probably the painting by Andrea Gastaldi, which had a huge success at the exhibition of the Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti in Turin in 1860. Gastaldi was rewarded with a professorship at the Turin Academy. Although Gastaldi in his title

Figure 4. Giulio Piatti, *Pietro Micca nell'atto di dar fuoco alla miccia*. (*Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, ill. 753. p. 678.)

made a reference to Botta's account, the spirit and 'moral' of the painting is quite different from his, or from Piatti's painting. Micca's attitude is one of serene and humble devotion: the hero, as the title indicates dedicates his last thoughts to 'God and his country' (Fig. 5).[31] Micca

[31] *Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, p. 680.

Figure 5. Andrea Gastaldi, *Pietro Micca nel punto di dar fuoco alla mina volge a Dio e alla patria i suoi ultimi pensieri, 1858*. (*Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, ill. 755. p. 680.)

remained a staple of patriotic propaganda in school textbooks and children's literature from 1860 on, right through the Fascist period.

The image of an army of simple soldiers united in devotion to their King and their Country by the late 1850s had changed in significance. It could now appeal even to democrats, who, like Garibaldi, had concluded that alliance with Victor Emanuel was the only hope for national independence. Garibaldi visited Micca's house during his recruiting drive for

volunteers in 1859. The leading sculptor Vincenzo Vela, who first became famous in 1848 for a statue of *Spartacus*, a clearly 'revolutionary' theme, and who had been expelled from the Lombardo-Veneto in 1851 after refusing a professorship at the Brera, produced one of the few really successful patriotic monuments in his statue of the *Alfiere piemontese*. (Piedmontese standard-bearer) (Fig. 6).[32] This statue, in an austerely realistic style, was placed in a very prominent position, in front of Piazza Madama, on the advice of Roberto d'Azeglio. It represented a strikingly different and more democratic image of Piedmontese martial spirit from that of the statues of princes on horseback. The *alfiere*, dressed in the standard military overcoat, is defending the tricolour flag. The circumstances in which the monument was commissioned and exhibited are of particular political significance. The monument was a gift offered in gratitude by the Milanese exiles in Piedmont. The monument was inaugurated in April 1859, on the eve of the war, and was taken by the Austrians as a deliberate act of provocation. It was said that the Austrian commander Gen. Gyulai had promised to destroy it when he occupied Turin.

If we can see in the choice of heroes and emblematic figures a sign of the monarchy's efforts to present itself as popular, as worthy of the love of the common soldier and the ordinary man, a similar conclusion can be drawn about the image of the King himself. The description of Victor Emanuel as the 're galantuomo', which was to crystallise his popularity, was probably first coined by the editor Giovanni Battista Bottero, the editor of the Turin *Gazzetta del Popolo*, though Massimo d'Azeglio, with his keen sense of what was effective in image-building, had much to do with its popularisation. In its original context, as a comment on the King's speech inaugurating parliament in December 1849, the attribution of the epithet *galantuomo* to the King was not so much an expression of confidence as a discreet warning. After the proclamation of Moncalieri, which warned that the King would not accept a parliamentary majority of the Left, the degree to which Victor Emanuel was ready to allow parliament to function was highly uncertain. Bottero was suggesting that if Victor Emanuel wanted to preserve his reputation for being a man of his word, he should be careful not to nullify the spirit of the Statute which he had promised to maintain. Flattering the King as a way of encouraging good behaviour was an established tactic since the 1840s, when it had been employed by both D'Azeglio and Gioberti with Charles Albert. D'Azeglio later admitted

[32] *Fantasmi di bronzo. Guida ai monumenti di Torino, 1808–1937* (Turin, 1978), pp. 21, 66.

Figure 6. Vincenzo Vela, *Monumento all'Alfiere dell'Esercito Sardo*. (*Fantasmi di bronzo. Guida ai monumenti di Torino, 1808–1937,* (Turin, 1978), ill. 16, p. 66.)

that, as is often the case, the King's bluff frankness of manner concealed a remarkable capacity for double-dealing and intrigue.

Nevertheless, the title stuck, and it did so because of some aspects of Victor Emanuel's personality. An unromantic figure, who was known to sign himself 'Victor Emanuel, called the ugly',[33] he craved popularity. In contrast to the austere Charles Albert, he was approachable and his very vulgarity and lack of culture assisted the creation of a populist myth of the king who was close to the people. The good-hearted king who bypasses his courtiers and ministers and learns the feelings and complaints of the people through direct contact, if necessary in disguise, is a well-established motif of folklore. Familiarity may breed contempt, but a reputation for familiarity need not do so. Victor Emanuel was hardly peculiar among nineteenth-century monarchs in his obsession with the destruction of game; but the image of 'the *re cacciatore*' was rich in populist overtones: the love of simple, rustic fare and pleasures, familiarity with ordinary people, the open-air life, and resistance to hardship. The popular Piedmontese writer Vittorio Bersezio described him 'living as a good and relaxed comrade with his hunting companions', resolute in his endurance of bad weather. 'Dressed in any old jacket, he liked to be thought some poor devil, and to talk *a tu per tu* with the peasants, and he preferred a meal of rough brown bread and onions to the dainty dishes of his kitchen.'[34] Carlo Collodi, in a school reading book, told the story of how the King had been taken for one of his servants by a peasant because of his simple attire.

The downside, from the point of view of monarchists, was the strong dislike which Victor Emanuel often expressed for his ceremonial duties. His successor, Umberto, deprived of his father's prestige and popularity, worked much harder to establish and diffuse the official presence of the monarchy in Italian life. Here again, though, a royal deficiency could in a way be converted to a virtue. Victor Emanuel's dislike of ceremony could be taken as a sign that he was a modern, almost 'bourgeois', citizen king. When it was suggested that in 1870 he should make a triumphal entry into Rome down the Via Sacra, the proposal was firmly scotched by his ministers Lanza and Sella as unsuitable for a civic monarch. There were frequent discussions about whether statues of the King should portray him in traditional fashion on horseback. Statues on foot, even in uniform, had the significance of a break with courtly tradition and put less emphasis on the King's distance from his subjects. When a standing statue was proposed for the Victor Emanuel monument in Rome, the Marchese

[33] *Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, p. 662.
[34] Ibid., p. 663.

Stefanone, a member of the royal household, protested that it was quite unsuitable for a 'hero who reconstituted the Great Italian fatherland not by walking on soft carpets but astride fiery and warlike horses'. A pedestrian statue was incompatible with 'the first attribute of a king, that is to say the leader (Duce), as Supreme Commander of the national forces'. He also objected to the exclusion of traditional emblems of the monarchy, and the inclusion of female allegorical statues at the base of the monument, which he regarded as intrinsically republican. But the influential architectural critic Camillo Boito praised the royal statue in Turin precisely for its democratic lack of the traditional attributes of royalty.[35]

There was a certain sense in which democrats and republicans commanded a broader and more flexible symbolic vocabulary. This is seen in the concerns over the figures which accompanied the statue of Cavour in Rome. Some monarchists again objected that the figure of Italy was holding the *fascio*, which was a specifically republican symbol, reminiscent of the Jacobins and the *carbonari*. (Italy is seen as protecting Rome.) Perhaps more surprising, Cavour was flanked by figures representing 'thought' and 'action', the classic Mazzinian pair. In the early 1900s the programme for the Victor Emanuel monument's Altar of the Fatherland was actually entrusted to a group of freemasons and republicans, although their project was eventually rejected.

In 1859 and 1860 Victor Emanuel, of course, acquired more solid foundations for his popularity than his supposedly folksy style. He became 'the father of the nation'. But the circumstances of unification created new problems and powerful rivals for popularity. The death of Cavour removed one rival and left a space empty which only the image of the King could fill. If this seems unconvincing, one should remember the way in which the image of Bismarck competed with and obscured that of successive Kaisers. But Cavour did not really have time to establish himself as a permanent national icon. With Garibaldi, of course, the story was very different. In the nineteenth century there were no popularity polls, but the photographs of the inauguration of the statues of Cavour and Garibaldi during the celebration in 1895 of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the taking of Rome give a measure of their relative popularity. Cavour attracted only a small crowd, whereas every space around and, indeed, on the monument to Garibaldi was filled. Of course, in some other Italian cities, particularly Turin, the results would have been more favourable to Cavour.

[35] F. Luciani, 'La "monarchia popolare" Immagini del re e nazionalizzazione delle masse negli anni della Sinistra al potere (1876–1891)', in 'La monarchia nella storia dell'Italia unita', *Cheiron*, XII, nn. 25–6 (1996) p. 151.

In the political cartoons of the time of unification, Victor Emanuel appears rather as an assistant of Garibaldi or Cavour than as the protagonist. Two images of the unification of Italy, use the obvious graphic potential of the *stivale* (Figs. 7 & 8). The first depicts Garibaldi as an artisan hero: the second makes a reference to the difficulties of unification. In both, the King's image is of secondary significance. Garibaldi was, of

Figure 7. *L'eroe artigiano*, cartoon by Foggi, *Arlecchino*, 22 Aug. 1860. (G. Spadolini, *L'autunno del Risorgimento* (Florence, 1971), Le Monnier, ill. 39, p. 164.)

Figure 8. *Uno stivale nuovo fatto di scarpe vecchie*, cartoon by Sanesi, *Il Lampione*, 15 May 1860. (G Spadolini, *Autunno*, ill. 30, p. 117.)

course, a mythical hero, even before the events of 1860, and his image was often identified with that of the Redeemer himself. The writer Carlo Dossi, in a review of a competition for a statue of Garibaldi, commented that the many inferior designs could not hide behind the excuses advanced by the designers of royal monuments. 'Inferior artists gave as their pretext that art found itself without resource faced with a body bundled up and confined in an anti-aesthetic uniform'.[36] He tactfully omitted any reference to Victor Emanuel's face and physique. Instead, Garibaldi's figure and dress were both made for portraiture. But, if you can't beat them, join them. Victor Emanuel was, to some degree, able to appropriate the myth of Garibaldi by association. The key scene here, a true founding image of the Italian state, was the famous *Incontro di Teano*, (Fig. 9) when Garibaldi surrendered his authority. Other images show a more solemn Garibaldi with his head covered (Fig. 10).[37] The image with head uncovered, however, corresponds to the account given by Garibaldi's ADC Missori to Trevelyan. Garibaldi is supposed to have waved his hat in the air and cried 'long live Victor

[36] *Fantasmi di bronzo*, p. 355

[37] I. Porciani, *Cartoni di Cesare Maccari per gli affreschi nel Palazzo Pubblico di Siena*, Ill. 23 (the fresco is by Pietro Aldi).

Figure 9. *Incontro di Garibaldi e Vittorio Emanuele II a Teano*, Toffaloni lithograph. (Courtesy *Index*, Florence.)

Emanuel, *first* King of Italy'.[38] This was a memory perhaps best avoided. Victor Emanuel pleased the Piedmontese traditionalists and disappointed patriots by sticking firmly to the number Two. Imagine a King James who had continued to call himself James VI instead of James I. The awkwardness which seems to have characterised the encounter, at least on Victor Emanuel's side, and the subsequent appalling and quite deliberate gaffe when the King failed to keep an appointment to review the Redshirts, were, of course, concealed. The scene of the Teano meeting had to present the image of the union between monarchy and people, and of a new Italian monarchy which had a double, compromise, legitimacy 'by the grace of God and the will of the nation'.

The acts of consent, really rituals rather than true consultations of the popular will, which founded the national legitimacy of the monarchy in the newly annexed regions were the plebiscites (Fig. 11). Enrico Gamba's prizewinning painting of the plebiscite in the Abruzzi attempts to present the new provinces of the South in a picturesque light. The characteristic bagpipers of the Abruzzi mountains, the *zampognari*, provide a note of folklore. As in many patriotic works of art, the composition depicts the union of different classes and generations. The latter is emphasised by the

[38] G. M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy*, (1911), p. 271.

Figure 10. Pietro Aldi, *Incontro de Teano*. (I. Pociani, 'La Sala del Re tra città e nazione', in *Cartoni di Cesare Maccari per gli affreschi nel Palazzo Pubblico di Siena*, ill. 23, p. 41.)

Figure 11. Enrico Gamba, *Il voto d'annessione nell'Abruzzo*. (*Cultura figurativa*, vol. 2, ill. 747, p. 675.)

different styles of dress of the members of the procession. A woman of the people in traditional costume has a prominent position in the picture, but she is at a distance from the procession. Women were allowed to be spectators but not full participants in the ceremonial creation of the nation. A portrait of the King can be seen on the flag mounted on the cart. One should remember that there had been fierce resistance to the invading Piedmontese army in 1860 in the Abruzzi, ruthlessly repressed, and that when the picture was exhibited, a year later, the outbreak of the 'great brigandage', which amounted to a real civil war, also had the Abruzzi as one of its centres. So this representation was, to say the least, optimistic.

During the 1860s the idea that the King had a special rapport with Garibaldi, which bridged the division between left and right, moderates and former republicans, furthered the very important motif in monarchist propaganda of the King as the Great Reconciler, the man who was capable of uniting Italians divided into parties and factions. This could be used to justify a literalist and conservative interpretation of the Statute, according to which the King chose his ministers freely without reference to parliament. It also allowed the 'loyal opposition' of the Sinistra Storica to contrast the open-hearted benevolence of the King with the exclusiveness and closure of the moderates in government. In the 1880s Victor Emanuel's successor, Umberto, was criticised by implication for not being *enough* of a King, unlike his father: but this time, the criticism clearly came from the Right, dispossessed of power.

In conclusion, I would like to offer some brief remarks on the problems raised by the question of Rome and relations with the Papacy. Certainly the breach of Porta Pia, not a great military victory but pregnant with symbolism, was one of the few events which could rival the appeal of Garibaldi's exploits. The phantom of Mazzini's 'Third Rome' of the peoples was finally banished by the royal conquest. The monarchy acquired a new dignity. On the other hand, popular prints and cartoons show the strength of the belief in a national reconciliation which would include not only the King and Garibaldi, but Pius IX and perhaps Mazzini as well. Some images of the 1860s show a frankly secular view of the king as the competitor and destined conqueror of Papal tyranny and superstition. But perhaps more interesting is the strength of the aspiration to a reconciliation between King and Pope which is shown by popular prints. This surfaces especially after 1870. In spite of the Syllabus of Errors and of Pius IX's absolute condemnation of the new Italian state, he continues to figure among the founders of the new Italy (Fig. 12). In this rather charming if unlikely

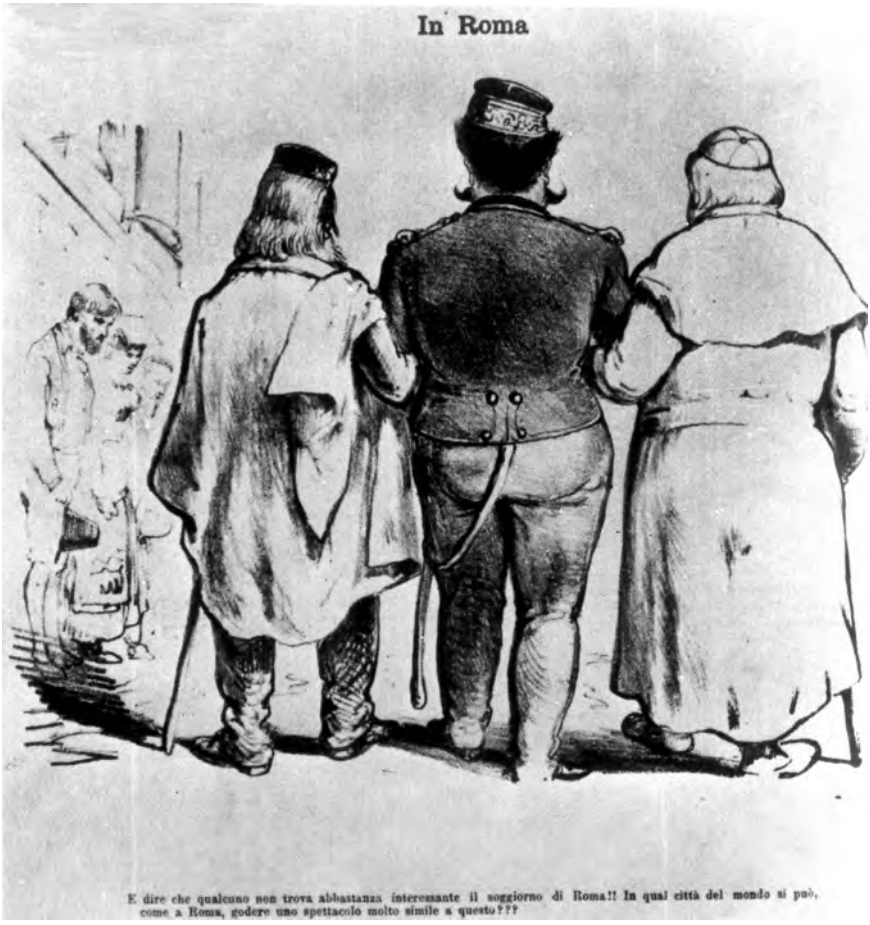

Figure 12. *In Roma*, cartoon by Casimiro Teja, *Pasquino*, 17 Jan. 1875. (G. Spadolini, *Autunno del Risorgimento*, ill. 80, p. 357.)

vision of Victor Emanuel, Pius IX and Garibaldi strolling arm-in-arm, one should note that the King has the strategic central position. If reconciliation could not take place on earth, at least, ideally, it could take place in Heaven (Fig. 13). In this vision it is Victor Emanuel, not Pius IX, who has the halo.

The denial of ceremonial functions to the State by the Church was a very real problem. It came as a deep shock to most moderates when they realised that the new monarchy could not benefit from the sacralisation of the Church. Bishops were not allowed to celebrate the *Te Deum* on days of national festivity, in honour of the King, outside his old dominions.

Figure 13. *Una partita a tresette in paradiso tra i personaggi che hanno contribuito all'unità d'Italia*, anon. Lithograph. (Courtesy *Index*, Florence.)

The supporters of the Pope pointed out that Victor Emanuel's new throne lacked those elements which had in the past sustained monarchy: tradition, the blessing of the Church, and legal sanction. Could popular support make up for this?

There was one consolation for the monarchy in this uncompromising hostility of the Church. Again, it made more rather than less plausible the image of a new type of monarch, certainly still a Warrior, but also the representative of modern society and progress. And, at least in urban society, the Church's refusal of religious rites and celebration often caused profound anger. On the King's death in 1878 a number of anti-clerical demonstrations took place when religious authorities refused to share in the expressions of mourning.

I have tried here at least to supply some suggestions about how to fill one of the gaps in the new history of Italian patriotism and national identity. I think that the study of the cult of the monarchy needs to be balanced by a study of popular patriotism in all its forms, which was a much stronger force in the 1870s and 1880s than has sometimes been suggested. The network of veterans' societies, sharpshooters' clubs, and other asso-

ciations was prevalently democratic in orientation, although it was also open to monarchist influence and patronage. In fact, this associative life, which did play a real role in 'the nationalisation of the masses', at least in some regions, was a crucial field of competition between republicans, middle-of the road democrats, and moderate monarchists.

If we look ahead to the history of the monarchy between 1878 and 1898, which has been more thoroughly studied, what strikes me is that the monarchy was not so much intrinsically weak as burdened with excessive expectations. Not least because of the uninspiring character of King Umberto, and even more because of the deficiencies of the repressive, militarist education which the members of the House of Savoy received, the monarchy was ill-fitted to play the role of arbiter and reconciler which was ever more invoked as the political system fell into deeper discredit. And the tension between the military and civil images of the monarchy remained unresolved.